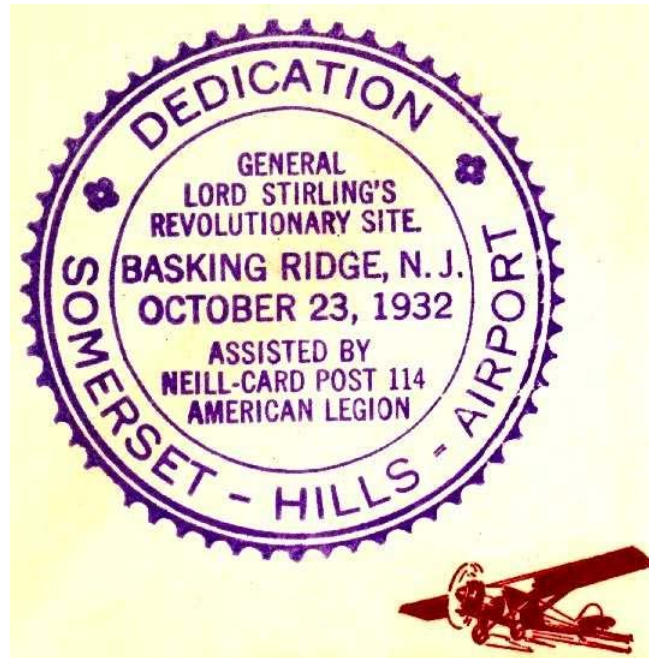


Somerset Hills Airport (N64), Basking Ridge, NJ

40.69 North / 74.53 West (West of New York, NY)



A 1932 postmark commemorating the dedication of the Somerset Hills Airport (courtesy of Ed Drury).

This general aviation airport was dedicated on October 23, 1932, according to a postmark commemorating the event (courtesy of Ed Drury).

The 1934 Department of Commerce Airport Directory (according to Chris Kennedy) described Somerset Hills Airport as having 3 sod runways, with the longest being a 1,900' east/west strip.



Somerset Hills Airport, as depicted on the 1935 Regional Aeronautical Chart.



The earliest photo which has been located of Somerset Hills Airport was an undated aerial view looking north from The Airport Directory Company's 1937 Airports Directory (courtesy of Bob Rambo).

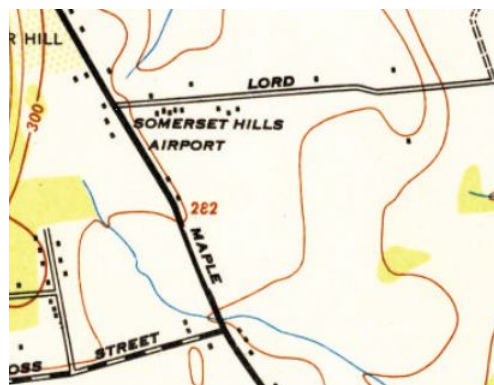
It described Somerset Hills as having a total of 3 sod runways,
with the longest being a 2,600' east/west strip.

The aerial photo depicted several hangars along the north side of the field.

According to a historical sign commemorating Somerset Hills Airport,
it served as an Army Air Corps flight training facility starting in 1941.

The 1944 US Army/Navy Directory of Airfields (courtesy of Ken Mercer)
described Somerset Hills as having a 2,200' runway.

According to a historical sign commemorating Somerset Hills Airport,
the Army Air Corps' use of the field ended in 1945.



The 1947 USGS topo map depicted Somerset Hills Airport as an open area with several small buildings along the north side.

A 1956 aerial photo depicted Somerset Hills as having 3 unpaved runways,
and a hangar on the north side of the field, near which were parked over 25 light aircraft.

A 1957 aerial photo depicted the field in the same manner.

Paul Downing recalled, "Regarding Basking Ridge, as Somerset Hills Airport was more commonly known back in 'the day',

I soloed there on my 16th birthday & got my Private license one year later on my 17th.

This would have been July, 1957 & 1958.

At that time the airport was owned by Harry Calvin, a 707 flight engineer with Pan Am based in New York.

Rick Decker operated the airport, having moved up there when Westfield Airport closed.

Rick's brother in law, Richard 'Brick' Karl came with him as mechanic.

There was always a carnival atmosphere around the airport, always something going on.

The towns people would come out in droves,

filling up the parking lot waiting for the impromptu airshow that would always take place, Ed Mahler usually starting it."

Paul continued, "Rick had an old fashioned bicycle - 5' front wheel, 1' rear wheel - that he kept at the airport.

We found several rolls of theater tickets in the attic of the tiny office as well as an old PA system that still worked.

We set up the PA, someone played a guitar & sang, I rode the bike up & down the line

and we sold airplane rides for a penny a pound, made a lot of money,

kids were coming back 3& 4 times, couldn't believe it."



Two 1959 aerial photos of Basking Ridge Airport by Paul Downing.

Paul Downing recalled, "There was a farm house & barn just to the south of the approach end of the west runway

with power lines running from the street, across the end of the runway to the house.

The farmer refused to bury the lines which subsequently snagged aircraft over the years, though none fatally.

I think the lines were finally buried after I left."



A 1959 photo by Paul Downing of a Meyers OTW at Basking Ridge.

Andy Wells recalled, "In the spring of 1961 (my senior year in high school), I discovered that if I showed up at Basking Ridge with \$6 (or more), I could get a short flying experience from Pop Decker in one of his 2 J-3 Cubs.

He would do the take off & quickly give me the controls. I was then free to fly around until my dollars were used up.

He never actually taught me anything at all, just let me experiment with the controls.

I was an experienced aeromodeler by then, so had an inkling of what to do.

I always managed to fly over to my home town of Cranford, make a few turns around the high school, then get back to someplace near the airport, where Pop would take over with a big shake of the stick & make the landing."

Paul Downing recalled, "Harry Calvin was transferred to Pan Am's SFO base,
Rick & Brick went down to run Kupper Field
and Jimmy, Harry's son, took over operations at Basking Ridge for awhile.
Harry was killed in an F4F accident on the west coast, I believe his wife sold the airport."

The 1961 NY Local Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of Mike Keefe)
described Somerset Hills as having 3 turf runways, with the longest being 2,400'.

Somerset Hills Airport was described in the 1962 AOPA Airport Directory
as having with 3 turf runways (the largest being an 1,800' east/west strip).
and the operators were listed as Lawrence Tokash & James Stanley.

A 1963 aerial photo depicted Somerset Hills as having 3 unpaved runways,
and a hangar on the north side of the field, near which were parked over 20 light aircraft.

Kern Buck reported, "The best description of Somerset Hills Airport in the 1960s
appears in a book written by my brother, Rinker Buck, 'Flight of Passage'.

The flight described in the book began at Somerset Hills Airport.

Both Rinker & I made our 1st solo flights there, mine in 1964, Rinker's in 1966."

Kern continued, "At that time, the field still had grass runways.

The main runway, 9/27 was about 2,500' long, with a very small hill at the east end, the grade of which was no greater than the normal descent path of a light airplane.

Approaching from the west, one also descended over a declining grade, with trees underneath & 25' wires over the threshold at Maple Avenue.

Runway 15 had a flat approach over open field, but 10' wires over the dusty road leading from Maple Avenue to the airport parking lot.

The approach to Runway 33 was also relatively flat, but there was a small housing development near the threshold, and one of the houses had a TV antenna atop the roof.

The antenna was a factor for such a short runway."

Kern continued, "The original operations building was still being used in the 1960s. It was about the size of a child's playhouse, and had about 125 square feet of space inside. The hangar was larger. It could hold 4 light airplanes, if they were positioned correctly."

Kern continued, "At any one time during that era, the field was home for from 15-30 airplanes, including civilianized World War II AT-6s, PT-19s, a PT-23, and a rare Meyers OTW.

There was also an assortment of Cubs, Aeroncas, Taylorcrafts, etc."

Kern continued, "It was a great airport, somewhat unruly.

I recall Ed Mahler, who was a well known aerobatic pilot at the time, flying his AT-6 on the deck toward the hangar at a speed approaching 300 mph before pulling straight up.

I was the only one looking at the time. I guess he was practicing.

He built his famous biplane, the PJ-260, in the hangar at Basking Ridge."



A 1970 photo of Somerset Hills Airport by Pete Galligan.

One runway at Somerset Hills was apparently paved at some point between 1962-70,

as Pete recalled that "at that time there was just one paved runway, and one grass."

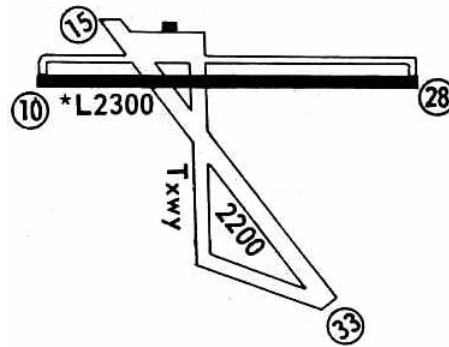


Somerset Hills Airport in 1970, by Pete Galligan.



A 1970 aerial view depicted Somerset Hills' newly paved runway.

It also showed the field perhaps at its zenith of popularity,
with a total of over 37 light aircraft were visible parked on the north side of the field.



The 1972 Flight Guide (courtesy of Chris Kennedy)

depicted Somerset Hills as having a 2,300' paved Runway 10/28 & a 2,200' unpaved Runway 15/33.

A ramp on the northern side of the field had a single building along its northern edge.

About Somerset Hills Airport, Dennis Sandow recalled "I've lived under its traffic pattern since 1976.

The proximity caused me to become aware of GA & want to take up flying.

Between 1976 & about 1980, I don't ever recall seeing more than 6-10 based aircraft there."

Jan Wolitzky recalled, "I once visited the airport with my Grumman Cheetah N9734U during the late 1970s,

but with the surrounding trees I felt the field was too short for comfort."

Niel Young recalled, "About 1978 there was a new maintenance & repair FBO who took over from Jim Calvin.

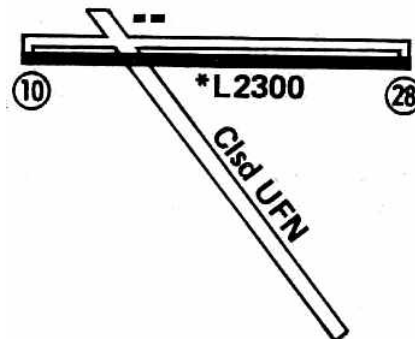
It was a successful operation that helped keep the airport going with 4 mechanics.

In the winter of 1979-80 the hangar burned down due to highly suspicious circumstances, with absolutely no connection to Calvin or the FBO.

I left the area shortly thereafter so I don't know the impact of the fire on the ultimate demise of the airport

but I'm sure the loss of the the FBO & the accompanying traffic contributed to it.

Up to that time it was a fairly active little airport."



The 1979 Flight Guide (courtesy of Chris Kennedy)

showed that the crosswind grass runway was "Closed until further notice",

leaving the field's sole runway as the 2,300' paved Runway 10/28.

Two buildings were depicted on the north side of the field.

The last photo which has been located showing the Somerset Hills Airport in operation was a 1979 aerial view.

It depicted a very well-used little airport, with over 2-dozen light aircraft visible parked on the field.

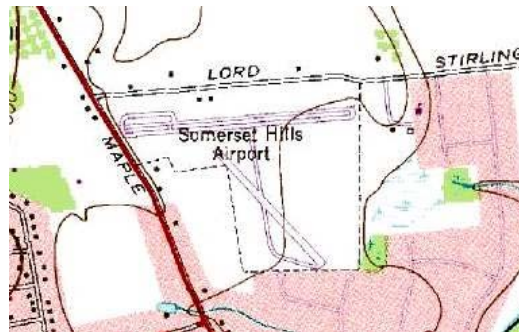


Somerset Hills was still depicted as an active airfield on the 1979 NY TCA chart (courtesy of Bill Suffa), and described as having a single 2,300' paved east/west runway.

Dennis Sandow recalled, "The legal issues started when a pilot landed short & hard (stalled turning final?)

on the athletic field of the high school about half mile west of the runway - about 1980.

The town quickly turned negative, and everything was downhill from then on."



As depicted on the 1981 USGS topo map,

the airfield consisted of 2 paved runways (the largest was 2,400' long) & several taxiways.

Dennis Sandow recalled, ""The AT&T operating Headquarters was located less than 2 miles away,

but the official corporate Headquarters was still in NYC.

In April 1982, I last flew out of the field in a charter helicopter,

which regularly used the field to pick up & deliver AT&T execs flying into NYC.

At that time, the FBO was closed & there were no based aircraft left on the field."

In a [1996 report](#) by the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission's Subcommittee on Airport Closings,

reasons were given for the closing of 13 New Jersey general aviation airports.

According to the report, in its final 16 years of operation,

Somerset Hills Airport saw its taxes rise 500%, from \$2,000 / year to \$10,000 / year.

The report also pointed out that litigation costs for development of small airports

had become enormous, discouraging airport growth.

At one point late in its existence, the owners of Somerset were trying to build 20 T-hangars, but found their litigation expense equaled the expense of the improvements they were intending to make.

Somerset Hills Airport was apparently closed at some point between 1982-83, as it was not listed among active airfields in the 1983 Flight Guide (according to Chris Kennedy).

By the time of the 1986 USGS topo map, it was labeled "Airfield (Abandoned)".

A 1987 aerial photo showed that housing had covered the site, with not a trace recognizable of Somerset Hills Airport.



As of the above circa 2001 aerial photo, the site of Somerset Hills Airport had been completely redeveloped as a condominium complex, with not a trace recognizable remaining of the airfield.



A December 2006 photo by Daniel Berek of the site of Somerset Hills Airport, now covered with housing.



A 2008 photo by Jan Wolitzky of a historical sign which commemorates the site of Somerset Hills Airport.

The site of Somerset Hills Airport is located
southeast of the intersection of Maple Avenue & Lord Stirling Road.

Thanks to James G. for pointing out this airfield.